

SOCIAL WORK IN ZIMBABWE

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BY

EDWIN KASEKE

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

P BAG 66022, KOPJE

HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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The development of social work in Zimbabwe like in many countries was a direct response to the problems created by the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. In order to understand the problems associated with the two processes one has to gain an appreciation of the political context in which the processes occurred. The advent of colonialism in Zimbabwe marked the beginning of a capitalist penetration in the country through the introduction of a money economy. The money economy created the need to work among the indigenous population and resulted in rural-urban migration. The urban economy could not cope with the large rural-urban migrants. As a result there was a proliferation of social problems in urban areas namely destitution, unemployment, adjustment problems and social disorganisation, overcrowding and lack of shelter.

The development of social work in Zimbabwe was closely linked to the containment of the problems of juvenile delinquency and truancy. In response to the problem of juvenile delinquency and truancy a probation and school attendance officer was appointed. The officer was recruited from Britain as there was no trained personnel in the country. This eventually led to the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare. The functions of the Department of Social Welfare were later expanded to include relief of distress, fostering and adoption. As there were no social work training institutions, practitioners were recruited from abroad. In addition, Zimbabweans went for social training in Western Europe, United States of America, Zambia and South Africa. The Jesuit Fathers in Zimbabwe through Fr Ted Rogers saw the need for providing social work training and this led to the establishment of the School of Social Work in 1964.

The School of Social Work initially offered a one year course in group work which was geared towards training grassroots workers to work with groups and communities. Of particular importance was the need to train social workers to assist groups and communities to identify their felt needs and problems and to take collective action to meet those needs and solve the problems.

In 1966 the School of Social Work launched a three year Diploma in Social Work and became an associate college of the University of Zimbabwe in 1969. In 1975 a Bachelor of Social Work degree was launched. In addition to the afore mentioned courses the School of Social Work now offers a Bachelor of Clinical Social Work (Honours) a BSc Rehabilitation and a Masters degree.

It must be mentioned that during the formative years, curricula at the School of Social Work although it included community work, placed greater emphasis on casework. As a result, fieldwork experiences for social work students were often in casework agencies. Consequently, the majority of social work graduates over the years have found employment in casework agencies. Because of social work's Western origin, it therefore followed that the literature used was almost exclusively American and British. Literature from such notable authors as Felix Biestek, Helen Perlman, Florence Hollis, Trecker and Gisela Konopka was widely used in social work training. Emphasis on casework reflected the general concern of the social work profession at the time namely the use of social work as an instrument of social control in society. Such a perspective viewed causation of social problems as being internal or psychological hence as treatment, the individual was required to adjust to his environment. Juvenile delinquency for instance, was seen as something rationally decided hence the need, for treatment purposes, to punish the individual. Juvenile delinquency was thus never seen as a reflection of social need. Treatment was therefore designed to ensure that individuals would adjust to the norms and values of their society thereby creating social stability and order in society.

Social work students at the School of Social Work in Harare were socialised into this type of social work through their fieldwork placements. Social welfare in Zimbabwe has always adopted the residual model in that it has been regarded as a substitute mechanism of need ~~for~~ fulfilment. Social welfare was seen to respond to crisis situations. The assumption behind this model is that social need should only be met through the preferred and normal structures namely the family and the economy. Only when an individual is unable to make use of these structures can he turn to social welfare. The model reflects optimism that the economy would

generate enough jobs for the people which in turn would enhance people's ability to purchase social services. This expansion would in fact allow people to earn higher incomes thus ⁿⁱ minimising the need for social welfare. The School of Social Work found itself training social workers to service urban communities since the provision of social welfare was confined to urban areas. Rural communities were neglected under the erroneous assumption that their needs were simple and that they could be met within the extended family.

In the late 1970's the School of Social Work in anticipation to the granting of political independence to the country, began to prepare social work students to play a meaningful role in the reconstruction of the country. The School sought to develop a social work education that was relevant to the needs of the country and one that addressed itself to the problems of poverty, deprivation and under-development in general. As Muzaale (1986) notes, social workers have not seriously considered the problems of poverty. Consequently, other professions have questioned the relevance of social work in Third World countries and this is probably the major reason why social welfare is given low priority by many governments. The School of Social Work like many social work training institutions has begun to question the relevance of social work's traditional approaches. Social work training in Zimbabwe is now focussing on social development. This is based upon the realisation that the social work profession's "exclusive" concern with treating vulnerable individuals in the urban areas of developing countries is an inappropriate response to social need in the Third World (Midgley 1981). The social problems that social workers have been attending to over the years are only symptoms and not the real diseases. Such problems as unemployment, poverty,, juvenile delinquency etc. are usually a reflection of structural problems. The School of Social Work has realised that the prescriptions of the modernisation theory have not produced the intended results. Although over the years some economic growth has been experienced, economic growth as Midgley and Hardiman (1982) point out, "has not been a guarantee of improved levels of living and welfare". The fruits of economic growth have not 'trickled down' to the masses and the gap between the rich and the poor continue to widen. Thus, social work training in Zimbabwe is now committed to developing a social work education that prepares its students to function meaningfully as agents of social change.

The focus is now on social development which is geared towards making the necessary structural changes in order to improve the quality of life. Emphasis is on developing developmental roles which will enable the profession to deal with the problem of poverty and underdevelopment. Because the majority of the real poor in Zimbabwe live in the rural areas social work education now focuses on training cadres capable of spearheading the battle to raise the ⁿstandards of living in rural areas. Of particular importance is the need to increase the 'productivity of the poor and the creation of real opportunities for earning income. If the social work profession is to achieve credibility and recognition in society it must be seen to have impact on solving the problem of poverty, deprivation and social injustice.

Accordingly, the curricula at the School of Social Work now includes rural development, research, social policy and planning. Classroom instruction is complemented by practical instruction in agencies involved in social development. To this end the School of Social Work has established a Rural Fieldwork Unit which provides social work students with opportunities to acquire skills necessary for rural intervention. Admittedly, this is not enough in terms of maximising the effectiveness of social workers as agents of social change. There is need to place emphasis on project planning, project evaluation and advocacy skills. It is important for social workers to develop advocacy skills if the voice of the poor and the marginalised is to be heard.

We at the School of Social Work feel that this is only the beginning and a lot still remains to be done. We are fully committed to developing a social work education that is culturally, socially, politically and economically relevant to the needs of Zimbabwe. Since there has been over reliance on Western literature, the School of Social Work feels that the dissertation requirements on the Bachelor of Social Work degree allows the School to develop and accumulate indigenous literature. Social workers cannot operate in a political vacuum hence our conviction that social work in Zimbabwe must be in harmony with the government's socialist thrust which seeks to provide all its citizens with opportunities for self-fulfilment. We echo the words of Gokhale (1974) that social workers must

transform themselves from being craftsmen to become architects tasked with the responsibility of restructuring society. This structuring seeks to harmonise the relationship between the individual and his environment, thus facilitating the realisation of one's potential in society.

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